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2                   **STATEMENT OF OLIVIA GOLDEN, DIRECTOR**  
3                   **CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY**  
4                   **TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE**  
5                   **ON APPROPRIATIONS, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SUBCOMMITTEE,**  
6                   **REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF “DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
7                   **FAMILYCOURT ACT OF 2001.”**

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9                   **Wednesday, April 10, 2002**  
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12               Good afternoon Chairman Knollenberg, Ranking Member Fattah, and Members  
13 of the Subcommittee on District of Columbia Appropriations. I am Olivia Golden, the  
14 Director of the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for the District of Columbia.  
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16               I am most appreciative of the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of Mayor  
17 Anthony A. Williams and Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders  
18 Carolyn Graham regarding the implementation of the “District of Columbia Family Court  
19 Act of 2001.” I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Congressman Delay,  
20 Congresswoman Norton, and Senators Landrieu and DeWine for their leadership in the  
21 passage of the Family Court Act, as well as Chief Judge King and Presiding Judge  
22 Satterfield for their leadership in implementation of the Act.  
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24               This legislation is a key element of our reform strategy for the District of  
25 Columbia’s child welfare system and is critical to our success in protecting children’s  
26 safety, ensuring that children grow up in permanent families, and promoting the  
27 wellbeing of the District’s most vulnerable children. This reform was possible through  
28 the key changes in District statute and regulation made through the commitment of  
29 Mayor Williams and the D.C. Council including elevating the District of Columbia’s  
30 Child and Family Services Agency to a Cabinet-level agency with independent personnel  
31 and procurement authority and the unification of abuse and neglect services in the  
32 District. The Family Court Act is the last piece in structural reform that will dismantle  
33 institutional and legal barriers that once stood in the way of providing effective and  
34 efficient services to the District’s abused and neglected children, and is completely

35 consistent with the goals of Mayor Williams' Safety Net: Strengthening the Children,  
36 Youth and Families Initiative.

37  
38 I am pleased to report that since the District of Columbia Family Court Act of  
39 2001 was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, CFSA has been working  
40 closely with the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families and Elders, the Superior  
41 Court, and other key stakeholders to provide input into the implementation plan and puts  
42 the first steps toward reform into place as rapidly as possible. We greatly appreciate the  
43 Court's responsiveness of input and discussion. The Deputy Mayor's Office and CFSA  
44 are still reviewing the Court's final plan and detailed comment would be premature,  
45 however, we would like to express appreciation for several broad themes of the Court's  
46 plan as we currently understand it:

- 47 • The clear focus of the plan is children's safety and prompt movement towards  
48 permanence, consistent with the Federal and District Adoption and Safe  
49 Families Acts;
- 50 • The commitment to move immediately to a One Judge/One Family approach  
51 for all new abuse and neglect cases by bringing together all aspects of the  
52 abuse/neglect proceeding from just after the initial hearing through the final  
53 steps to permanence;
- 54 • The commitment to an ongoing and regular framework for consultation and  
55 joint decision-making with stakeholders, which reflects the principal that we  
56 must move forward together on reform of the whole system, including a  
57 framework for consolidating juvenile delinquency cases with existing child  
58 abuse and neglect cases involving the same child or children;
- 59 • The commitment to promoting improved outcomes for children through  
60 teamwork among the judicial team, the attorneys, and social workers who  
61 work with children, as well as through family engagement; and
- 62 • The understanding that achieving teamwork and better outcomes requires  
63 improved scheduling and a sharp reduction in the number of judges that  
64 attorneys and social workers must appear before, as well as training

(including cross-training), clarification of roles, and the development of mutual respect and trust across all members of the team.

We also very much appreciate the Court's sense of urgency about making these improvements, as reflected in our work together this Spring to select cases that will benefit the most from immediate movement into the new Family Court.

In the remainder of my testimony, I would like to summarize the District's child welfare reform efforts, as these efforts complement those envisioned in the Family Court Act and the Plan developed by the Court, and then turn to the Mayor's perspective on Family Court implementation to date. Finally, I would like to close by asking for the Committee's continued support of the District's reforms on behalf of abused and neglected children, and in particular for support of a proposal in the District's FY2002 supplemental budget that would increase the Federal reimbursement rate for foster care and adoption in the District to be equal to the Medicaid reimbursement rate.

### **Child Welfare Reform in the District**

In the ten months since the ending of the Federal Court receivership on June 15, 2001 – and since my arrival as Director of CFSA – the pace of reform in the District's child welfare system has been dramatic. Last October, when I testified before Congress on the Family Court legislation, I emphasized that the passage of the Family Court legislation would “synchronize reform across major parts of the child welfare system.” Now, six months later, I am pleased to report to you that paralleling and complementing the work of the Congress and the Court, the District has taken swift and dramatic steps to address the safety of children and their need to grow up in permanent families. Among the major changes accomplished in less than one year:

- **Unification under CFSA of the responsibility for abuse and neglect investigation and services, thus ending the fragmentation that had placed responsibility for abused children in the District with two separate agencies (the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and Court Social Services) and responsibility for neglected children with CFSA.** This

fragmented system, unique to the District among jurisdictions nationwide, had been cited by many observers as a key barrier to serving families effectively. Today, children who are victims of either abuse or neglect are protected by a unified set of services and dedicated professionals. To bring this new structure into being, CFSA has increased staffing for investigations, trained every intake staff member through a curriculum jointly developed with MPD, created new specialized units to investigate sexual abuse and serious physical abuse as well as abuse in out-of-home settings, and sought out experts from across the country to ensure that we take full advantage of already established and tested best practices.

- **Promulgation of the District’s first licensing requirements for foster homes, group homes, and independent living facilities.** These standards address the major aspects of safety and quality, including staffing, training, management, and facility maintenance, and for the first time enable us to focus on our children’s wellbeing in out-of-home care. In addition, we have created a new Office of Licensing and Monitoring to provide technical assistance, monitoring, and enforcement of the new standards.
- **Reform of the legal support provided to CFSA social workers, including more than doubling the number of attorneys so social workers can always be represented in court and restructuring legal services to enable much closer coordination between attorneys and social workers.** Our goal is to have legal representation alongside our social workers for every single hearing and we are well on our way to implementation. With approximately 40 Assistant Corporation Counsel (ACC) attorneys now on board – compared to 16 in the abuse and neglect section before the legal services reform began – ACCs now attend approximately 80 percent of all hearings. Further, within the coming days and weeks, all of the attorneys will be co-located with the social workers to facilitate communication, and coordination of case preparation and presentation. I am especially excited about the impact this will have in complementing the new team approach structure to the Family Court. Not only will it dramatically improve our responsiveness to the Court,

the enhanced communication between the attorneys and social workers facilitated by a closer physical proximity should result in providing better quality information to the Court. This relationship will translate into better decisions for the children being served.

- **Major emphasis on the recruitment, retention, and training of social workers to reduce caseloads so that workers can serve children more effectively and ensure that new workers gain the skills they need.**

Specifically, CFSA's goal is to have 300 case carrying social workers on board by the end of September 2002. As of March 2002, before the height of Spring recruiting from undergraduate and graduate social work programs, we have 246 licensed Masters of Social Work (MSW) and Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) qualified social workers. In addition, there are 27 Social Worker Trainees on staff who are not yet licensed. To do this, we have worked with the Federal Court to enable us to reach out to licensed Bachelor's level as well as Master's level social workers; created and filled the position of full time recruiter; and worked with foundation and university partners to develop additional recruitment strategies. We are currently working closely with the United States Public Health Service with the goal of finalizing an agreement whereby the Public Health Services Commissioned Corps will provide social workers to fill critical staff shortages. In addition, we have implemented several strategies designed to improve retention and focus on training. A critical step is the creation of training units for new workers, where they are provided close supervision and gradually increasing caseloads as they learn specific skills they will need in handling child neglect and abuse cases. From the seven training units now in operation, I am pleased to report the first ten workers have just completed the training program and will be immediately replaced by new recruits who are waiting to come on board.

- **A major restructuring of the agency, placing the core case-carrying social work staff at the very center of the organization, elevating our focus on foster and adoptive parents, creating a new focus on the quality of clinical**

157 **practices inside the organization, and creating the new Office of**  
158 **Licensing and Monitoring described above.**

159 These reforms, together with the enactment of the Family Court Act, have transformed  
160 the institutional structure for child welfare in the District of Columbia.

161  
162 Our task now is to ensure that the institutional reforms result in a dramatic  
163 improvement in safety, permanency, and wellbeing for the children of the District. I  
164 would like to highlight one such improvement that we are able to report even at this early  
165 stage. In line with the evidence that children do better with a stable placement in a family  
166 wherever possible – particularly children whose lives have already been disrupted by the  
167 trauma of abuse and neglect – we have successfully closed the three off-site emergency  
168 shelters where children would remain in group settings for weeks or often months before  
169 a stable placement was located. Over a period of just a few months, we were not only  
170 able to place all of the children who were in these temporary shelters in more permanent  
171 settings, mostly with families, but also ensured that other children who come into care go  
172 straight to stable settings, generally family foster homes including extended family. This  
173 change has already directly and positively affected more than 150 children. This means a  
174 child will no longer face the prospect of days, weeks, or months in an emergency shelter  
175 – which serves only to compound an already traumatic situation and creates the problem  
176 of additional placement changes.

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178 **Family Court Implementation**

179 I would like to highlight three features of our work with the Superior Court on  
180 Family Court implementation to date: the Court's openness and willingness to seek out  
181 the input of key stakeholders, our appreciation of the key themes in the Court's plan, and  
182 our work with the Court to ensure that important changes for children are implemented as  
183 soon as possible. An example of the Court's openness to input was a retreat co-  
184 sponsored by the Anne E. Casey Foundation and the Court to learn from the experiences  
185 of other jurisdictions which have implemented family courts. This day long retreat  
186 included representatives from all stakeholders - including judges, social workers,  
187 guardian ad litem, Assistant Corporation Counsels, community providers, and foster

188 parents - who met with representatives of other jurisdictions which are currently  
189 operating successful family courts to discuss issues and options relating to  
190 implementation. Based on our initial review of the Court's plan, key lessons learned  
191 from other jurisdictions have been incorporated: for example, representatives of  
192 successful jurisdictions highlighted for us the value of a continuing forum for all  
193 stakeholders to meet and make decisions together. We understand the Court has  
194 incorporated such a regular forum into the plan.

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196 At the beginning of this testimony, I highlighted five key themes in the plan that  
197 we believe are particularly important to improving results for the District's abused and  
198 neglected children:

- 199 • The clear focus of the plan on children's safety and prompt movement towards  
200 permanence;
- 201 • The commitment to move immediately to a One Judge/One Family approach for all  
202 new abuse and neglect cases through permanence;
- 203 • The commitment to an ongoing and regular framework for consultation and joint  
204 decision-making with stakeholders;
- 205 • The commitment to promoting improved outcomes for children through teamwork  
206 and continued collaboration among all agencies under the District's Children, Youth,  
207 Families and Elders Cluster; and
- 208 • The understanding that achieving teamwork and better outcomes requires improved  
209 scheduling and a sharp reduction in the number of judges that attorneys and social  
210 workers must appear before, as well as other steps.

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212 These commitments involve not only major and positive change but also rapid  
213 change: the Court, Deputy Mayor Graham, CFSA, and other stakeholders are moving  
214 with a sense of urgency to promote better outcomes for children in the Family Court  
215 system. This summer, the Court will ensure that for all new abuse and neglect cases  
216 initiated, the entire proceeding will be heard by the same judicial team (which will  
217 include a Magistrate Judge and a judge) and from the initial emergency hearing to the  
218 point where permanency is achieved, whether through reunification, adoption, or

guardianship. This means that the same judge who hears the trial of a case will also hear the adoption or guardianship petitions, as well as every hearing in between, compared to past history where a child's case might have been heard by three or four judges and a family with several siblings might have been involved with several more. This change will promote a critical goal that Mayor Williams, the Congress, and the Superior Court all share: that children move swiftly to a permanent family, whether by going home or through adoption or permanent guardianship, rather than lingering for years in temporary settings. Achieving this goal will truly make a substantial difference to the children's lives, as well as move the District towards compliance with the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA), with the Program Improvement Plan required by the Federal Government's recent Child and Family Services Review, and with the expectations of the Federal Court.

A second major change that will benefit children and that we hope the Court will be able to phase in as rapidly as possible during the implementation period is the commitment to reducing the number of judges hearing abuse and neglect cases, in order to enable social workers and attorneys to work in teams with a limited number of well-trained and supported Family Court judges. This is key, because reducing the number of courtrooms where each social worker must appear means increasing the amount of time social workers spend in the field visiting children and families. Today, approximately 60 judges hear abuse and neglect cases, and CFSA social workers and the attorneys at OCC who represent us must cover all 60 courtrooms, creating a schedule of constant court appearances that makes it extremely difficult to schedule social workers' family visits. We are working with the Court to ensure that as rapidly as possible, the number of judges hearing abuse and neglect cases will be reduced as older cases move into the Family Court. Through these and many other changes envisioned in the plan – a commitment to cross-training, teamwork, and better technological support, for example - we anticipate that under the Family Court, CFSA social workers as well as all the other professionals who work with children and families will be able to provide much more timely and high quality information to support sound judicial decisions that ultimately benefit children.



250 **Continued Congressional Role in Child Welfare Reform**

251 As we continue to build on these dramatic reforms in child welfare District-wide,  
252 we want to express our deep appreciation for the continued commitment and support of  
253 this committee and the Congress as a whole. I want to highlight one area where your  
254 continued support is particularly important to our success: the District is proposing,  
255 through the legislative vehicle of the FY2002 supplemental budget request, that Congress  
256 increase the Federal reimbursement rate for foster care and adoption under Title IV-E of  
257 the Social Security Act to 70% -- the same reimbursement rate as Medicaid. As you are  
258 aware, several years ago the Medicaid reimbursement rate was raised for the District in  
259 light of the unique demographics and needs of the city. This proposal would bring the  
260 Title IVE rate in line with the Medicaid rate, as is the case in other jurisdictions.

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262 Because of Mayor Williams' deep commitment to children and to the most  
263 vulnerable children in particular, he has made a major budget commitment to child  
264 welfare reform in the District in this time of overall budget austerity. Your support in  
265 enhancing Federal revenues would make a major difference in ensuring the security and  
266 stability of this commitment -- and therefore of children - in the future.

267  
268 In conclusion, I would like to thank this Committee as well as your Congressional  
269 colleagues for your consistent support of the vulnerable children of the District of  
270 Columbia. It has been a pleasure working with Judge King, Judge Satterfield, and all of  
271 the partners and stakeholders in child welfare reform. I look forward to continuing our  
272 work together to keep children safe, enable children to grow up in permanent families,  
273 and promote the wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and families.

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275 Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.  
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